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# CIA advice may help to save poison victim

An East Side woman who attempted suicide by eating castor beans may live because a University Hospitals doctor remembered a celebrated Bulgarian assassination case and called the Central Intelligence Agency into action.

When Dr. Leigh Thompson, clinical pharmacologist at the hospital, learned the 48-year-old woman was poisoned by ricin, a violently poisonous substance in castor beans, he recalled the "umbrella gun" assassination of a Bulgarian defector, Georgi Markov, in London in 1978.

Markov was shot in the leg while walking down a London street, allegedly by a KGB agent using an umbrella gun, and the ricin poison pellet caused his death a few days later.

Authorities said the woman became depressed after an argument with her husband Tuesday night and ate about a dozen castor beans, from which castor oil is made, from a packet that was marked with poison warnings. She became ill and

was taken to Lakeside Hospital of the University Hospitals complex.

Doctors didn't know what had poisoned her until they secured the packet from which she had eaten.

That was when Thompson recalled the Markov case. He phoned the CIA's medical division at Langley, Va., and was put in touch with Dr. Christopher Green, who had special knowledge of ricin.

Meanwhile, Lakeside doctors had begun cleansing the woman's blood with plasma transfusions. Dr. Green advised the doctors to monitor her heart carefully, for the poison causes heartbeat irregularity that could kill.

Thompson said the woman's heartbeat did become irregular, so a pacemaker was used to stabilize it.

The victim is now considered out of danger but remains in the intensive care unit.

Doctors said ricin is a slow-acting poison and it may be a week or two before they can be sure the woman will survive. If she does, it was said, the medical profession for the first time will have important information about how to treat ricin poisoning.

Thompson said that, when ricin enters the bloodstream, it causes the red and white cells and platelets to glue together and thus the victim's organs begin to fail.